

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
CORPUS CHRISTI DIVISION

JAMES COY MIDDLETON	§	
	§	
v.	§	C.A. NO. C-09-135
	§	
NATHANIEL QUARTERMAN ¹	§	

MEMORANDUM AND RECOMMENDATION
TO GRANT RESPONDENT’S MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT

Petitioner is a state prisoner currently incarcerated at the Garza East Unit in Beeville, Texas. On June 11, 2009, petitioner filed this pro se habeas corpus petition pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254, challenging his 2008 conviction for theft. (D.E. 1). On July 8, 2009, respondent filed a motion for summary judgment asserting that petitioner’s claims are unexhausted. (D.E. 10). Petitioner has failed to file a response.² For the reasons stated herein, it is respectfully recommended that the respondent’s motion for summary judgment be granted, and that this habeas action be dismissed without prejudice.

¹ As Director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Correctional Institutions Division, Nathaniel Quarterman is the proper respondent in this habeas action. Braden v. 30th Judicial Cir. Ct of Ky., 410 U.S. 484, 494-95 (1973) (citing Wales v. Whitney, 114 U.S. 564, 574 (1885)); Mounce v. Knighten, 503 F.2d 967, 969 (5th Cir. 1974) (per curiam); West v. Louisiana, 478 F.2d 1026, 1029 n.1 (5th Cir. 1973) (citing Wales); see also Rule 2(a) of the Rules Governing Section 2254 Cases (“If the petitioner is currently in custody under a state court judgment, the petition must name as respondent the state officer who has custody.”)

² Pursuant to Local Rule 7.4, failure to respond is taken as a representation of no opposition.

I. JURISDICTION

The Court has jurisdiction over the subject matter and the parties pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2241, 2254, which provide that jurisdiction is proper where the inmate is confined, or where the conviction was obtained. Petitioner is incarcerated in Beeville, Texas. (D.E. 1). Jurisdiction is therefore proper in this Court.

II. BACKGROUND

On December 19, 2008, petitioner pleaded guilty in the 25th Judicial District Court of Colorado County, Texas, in Case No. CR 08-211, to the charge of theft of copper wire. (D.E. 10, Ex. A). He was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Id. He does not claim to have appealed his conviction, or to have filed any application for state habeas relief. (D.E. 1).

III. PETITIONER'S ALLEGATIONS

Petitioner raises four grounds for relief: (1) that he was denied effective assistance of counsel; (2) that he failed to understand the consequences of his plea; (3) that the prosecution failed to inform him of evidence favorable to his defense; and (4) that his prior felony conviction was improperly used to enhance his sentence, thereby subjecting him to double jeopardy. (D.E. 1, at 7-8).

IV. DISCUSSION

Respondent seeks summary judgment and dismissal of the petition on the grounds that petitioner's claims are unexhausted. (D.E. 10, at 3).

A. The Standard of Review for Summary Judgment Motions.

Rule 56 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure applies to federal habeas corpus cases. Clark v. Johnson, 202 F.3d 760, 764-65 (5th Cir. 2000). Summary judgment is appropriate when there is no disputed issue of material fact, and one party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c). Courts must consider the record as a whole, including all pleadings, depositions, affidavits, interrogatories and admissions on file, in the light most favorable to the non-movant. Caboni v. Gen. Motors Corp., 278 F.3d 448, 451 (5th Cir. 2002).

The party seeking summary judgment bears the initial burden of demonstrating an absence of a genuine issue of material fact and informing the court of the basis for its motion by identifying those portions of the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, admissions on file, and affidavits, if any, which support its contention. Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 323 (1986); Williams v. Adams, 836 F.2d 958, 960 (5th Cir. 1988). Any controverted evidence must be viewed in the light most favorable to the non-movant, and all reasonable doubts must be resolved against the moving party. Lujan v. Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n, 497 U.S. 871, 888 (1990).

If the moving party makes the required showing, then the burden shifts to the non-movant to show that a genuine issue of material fact remains for trial. Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp., 475 U.S. 574, 585-87 (1986); Fields v. City of S. Houston, 922 F.2d 1183, 1187 (5th Cir. 1991). The non-movant cannot merely rest on the allegations of the pleadings, but must establish that there are material controverted facts in order to preclude summary judgment. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e); Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248-49 (1986). Summary judgment is proper if the non-movant fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an element essential to his case on which he bears the burden of proof. Celotex, 477 U.S. at 322-23; ContiCommodity Servs., Inc. v. Ragan, 63 F.3d 438, 441 (5th Cir. 1995).

B. Petitioner's Claims Are Unexhausted.

A federal writ of habeas corpus from an inmate in state custody shall not be granted unless: 1) the inmate has exhausted his legal remedies in the state courts; 2) state corrective processes are absent; or 3) circumstances render such processes insufficient to protect the individual's rights. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1). The exhaustion requirement is satisfied when the substance of each claim has been fairly presented to the highest court of the state. See O'Sullivan v. Boerckel, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999); Fisher v. Texas, 169 F.3d 295, 302 (5th Cir. 1999) (citation omitted); Carter v. Estelle, 677 F.2d 427, 443 (5th Cir. 1982) (citations omitted).

The Fifth Circuit has explained that “[t]he state court system must have been presented with the same facts and legal theory upon which the petitioner bases his current assertions.” Ruiz v. Quarterman, 460 F.3d 638, 643 (5th Cir. 2006) (citing Picard v. Connor, 404 U.S. 270, 275-77 (1971)). The petitioner must also present his claim in accordance with the state court’s procedural rules. Mercadel v. Cain, 179 F.3d 271, 275 (5th Cir. 1999) (per curiam) (citation omitted). “This rule of comity reduces friction between the state and federal court systems by avoiding the ‘unseem[li]ness’ of a federal district court’s overturning a state court conviction without the state courts having had an opportunity to correct the constitutional violation in the first instance.” O’Sullivan, 526 U.S. at 845 (citations omitted).

Generally, exhaustion in Texas may take one of two paths: (1) the petitioner may file a direct appeal, followed, if necessary, by a petition for discretionary review in the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, or (2) the petitioner may file a petition for state writ of habeas corpus. Myers v. Collins, 919 F.2d 1074, 1076 (5th Cir. 1990) (citing Richardson v. Procnier, 762 F.2d 429, 431-32 (5th Cir. 1985)). Here, petitioner does not provide any evidence that he exhausted his state remedies. He affirmatively indicated in his petition that he had not filed a direct appeal of his conviction, or a state application for habeas corpus. (D.E. 1, at 3). Accordingly, it is respectfully recommended that petitioner’s claims are unexhausted and the petition should be dismissed without prejudice.

V. CERTIFICATE OF APPEALABILITY

An appeal may not be taken to the Fifth Circuit from a final order in a habeas corpus proceeding “[u]nless a circuit justice or judge issues a certificate of appealability.” 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(1)(A). Although petitioner has not yet filed a notice of appeal, it is respectfully recommended that this Court nonetheless address whether he would be entitled to a certificate of appealability. A district court may sua sponte rule on a certificate of appealability because “the district court that denies a petitioner relief is in the best position to determine whether the petitioner has made a substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right on the issues before that court. Further briefing and argument on the very issues the court has just ruled on would be repetitious.” Alexander v. Johnson, 211 F.3d 895, 898 (5th Cir. 2000) (per curiam).

The statute establishes that “[a] certificate of appealability may issue ... only if the applicant has made a substantial showing of the denial of a constitutional right.” 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(2). “The COA determination under § 2253(c) requires an overview of the claims in the habeas petition and a general assessment of their merits.” Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 336 (2003). To warrant a grant of the certificate as to claims denied on their merits, “[t]he petitioner must demonstrate that reasonable jurists would find the district court’s assessment of the constitutional claims debatable or wrong.” Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484

(2000). This standard requires a § 2254 petitioner to demonstrate that reasonable jurists could debate whether the motion should have been resolved differently, or that the issues presented deserved encouragement to proceed further. United States v. Jones, 287 F.3d 325, 329 (5th Cir. 2002) (citation omitted).

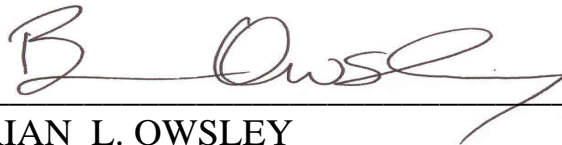
As to claims district courts reject solely on procedural grounds, a petitioner must show both “that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the petition states a valid claim of the denial of a constitutional right and that jurists of reason would find it debatable whether the district court was correct in its procedural ruling.” Slack, 529 U.S. at 484 (emphasis added).

It is respectfully recommended that reasonable jurists could not debate the denial on substantive or procedural grounds nor find that the issues presented are adequate to proceed. Miller-El, 537 U.S. at 327 (citing Slack, 529 U.S. at 484). Accordingly, it is respectfully recommended that the Court find that petitioner is not entitled to a certificate of appealability.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully recommended that respondent's motion for summary judgment, (D.E. 10), be granted, and that petitioner's habeas petition, (D.E. 1), be dismissed without prejudice as unexhausted. It is further respectfully recommended that petitioner be denied a certificate of appealability.

Respectfully submitted this 12th day of August 2009.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "B. Owsley", is written over a horizontal line.

BRIAN L. OWSLEY
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

NOTICE TO PARTIES

The Clerk will file this Memorandum and Recommendation and transmit a copy to each party or counsel. Within **TEN (10) DAYS** after being served with a copy of the Memorandum and Recommendation, a party may file with the Clerk and serve on the United States Magistrate Judge and all parties, written objections, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Rule 72(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure; Rule 8(b) of the Rules Governing § 2254 Cases; and Article IV, General Order No. 02-13, United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas.

A party's failure to file written objections to the proposed findings, conclusions, and recommendation in a magistrate judge's report and recommendation within TEN (10) DAYS after being served with a copy shall bar that party, except upon grounds of *plain error*, from attacking on appeal the unobjected-to proposed factual findings and legal conclusions accepted by the district court. Douglass v. United Servs. Auto. Ass'n, 79 F.3d 1415 (5th Cir. 1996) (en banc).